

Alamosa

National Wildlife Refuge

Rio Grande River Trail

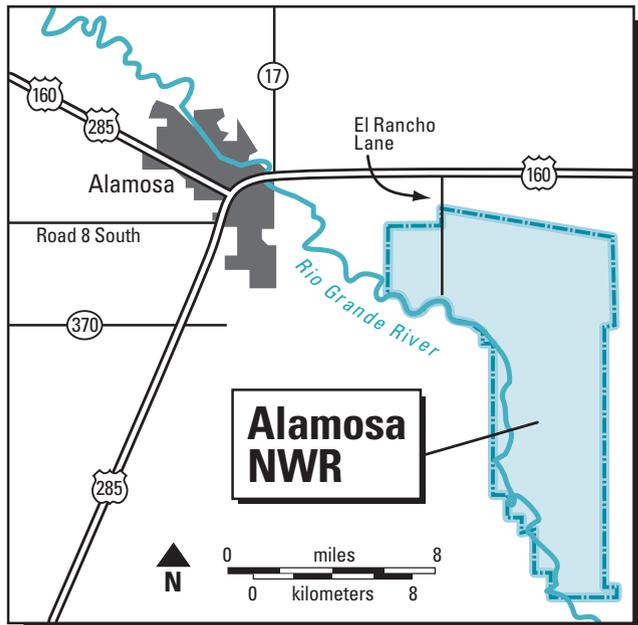
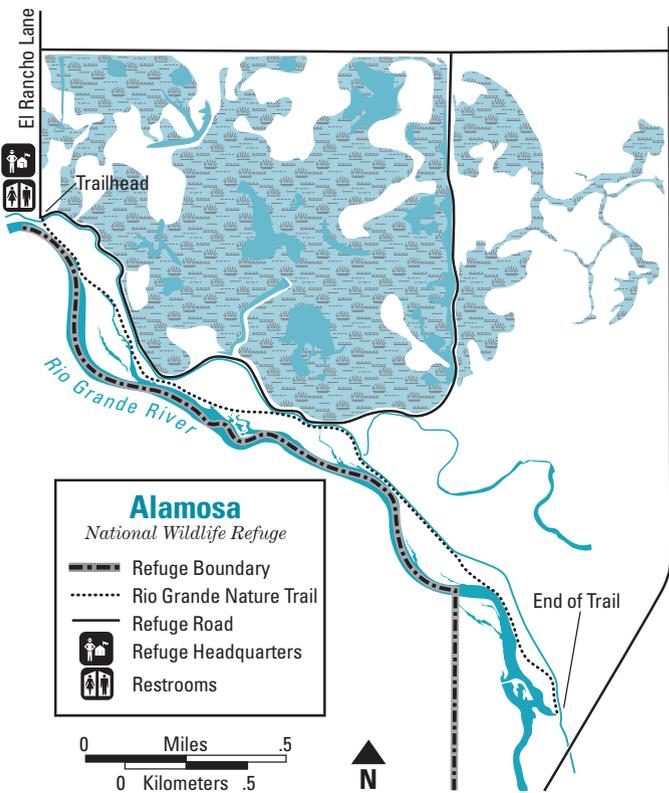
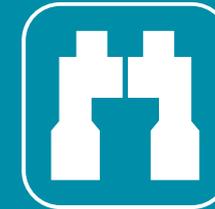
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About the Trail



This goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, is the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The Rio Grande River has long been considered the life blood of the San Luis Valley and of Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). While much of the river's dynamic nature has been tamed, it still provides countless wildlife benefits throughout its course.

Alamosa NWR includes more than 15 miles of critical riparian habitat adjacent to the river. The Refuge's Rio Grande River trail gives you access to 2 miles of this habitat for wildlife viewing and photography. Please take this brochure with you for information about the habitat, the management, and the wildlife seen along the trail.

Trail Regulations

- The trail is open to pedestrian visits from sunrise to sunset.
- Please stay on the trail.
- Leashed pets are welcome.
- Bicycles are permitted, but bicyclists must respect the rights of the other users.
- Hunting and fishing are prohibited.
- Please don't litter. Pack it in, pack it out!

Water Management

For nearly 150 years, farmers have diverted flows from the river to irrigate the arid landscapes of the San Luis Valley. This practice has significantly limited the river's flow pattern, altering the river's ability to move across the landscape as it had done for hundreds of thousands of years. The reduced flows considerably impacted the riparian areas.

Along the east side of the trail is the Chicago Ditch, which was established in the early 1900s for irrigation. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service currently owns all the water rights associated with this ditch. The Service uses the water to simulate the annual flooding which historically occurred across the landscape and to manage thousands of acres of wetland habitats within the Refuge for the benefit of migratory birds.

Riparian Habitats

For a bird's eye view of the historic wanderings of the Rio Grande River and current water management activities, take a drive to the Bluff Overlook area on the east side of the Refuge.

Along the trail you will see a wide variety of habitat types, from lush grasses, to dense stands of willow, to towering cottonwood trees. All these plant species benefit from the readily available water provided by the river.

This diverse mosaic of habitat types is crucial to the survival of a host of wildlife species on the Refuge. The lush grasses provide excellent nesting habitat for the numerous waterfowl species on the Refuge. The tall cottonwoods provide nesting and roost sites for a variety of raptors, including large concentrations of wintering bald eagles.

The most critical component of the riparian zone along the Rio Grande River is the low growing dense stands of willow. These willows provide important habitat for the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, which use them for nesting and for feeding on the abundant insects along the river. Numerous year-round residents, including elk and mule deer, use the riparian corridor throughout the year. The dense stands of willow provide secure fawning areas for the deer, as well as excellent thermal cover during the winter months.

What To See *Spring*

Typically, the river is one of the first major areas of water to open up within the valley, attracting large numbers of waterfowl. Large concentrations of bald eagles roost along the river during this time to feed on the arriving waterfowl as well as on the numerous winter killed fish found along the banks. As migration progresses, a variety of songbird species use the riparian corridor.

Summer

Watch for waterfowl and wading birds using the river to rest and feed as well as to nest in the dense grasses. Numerous songbirds nest in the willow habitats along the river, including the southwestern willow flycatcher. Beaver and muskrats are abundant in the river and in the Chicago Ditch.

Fall

Look for concentrations of shorebirds and wading birds along the shallow riverbanks. Waterfowl, especially Canada geese, frequent the river during this time. Occasional sandhill cranes spend the day loafing along the river. Fall migrations of numerous songbirds provide great wildlife viewing opportunities as well.

Winter

As the river freezes, wintering bald eagles congregate along the river searching for the remaining waterfowl that concentrate in the remaining pockets of open water along the river. With the leaves off the trees, the ever present porcupine are readily visible.

Year-round Encounters

Although seldom seen close up, elk, mule deer, coyotes, and porcupines frequent the river corridor year-round. Look for the numerous game trails that cross the river, as well as tracks, scat, and other signs of wildlife activities.

Accessibility Information

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs and activities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is available to all individuals regardless of physical or mental ability. Dial 711 for a free connection to the State relay service for TTY and voice calls to and from the speech and hearing impaired. For more information or to address accessibility needs, please contact the Refuge staff at 719 / 589 4021, or the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Equal Opportunity, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.